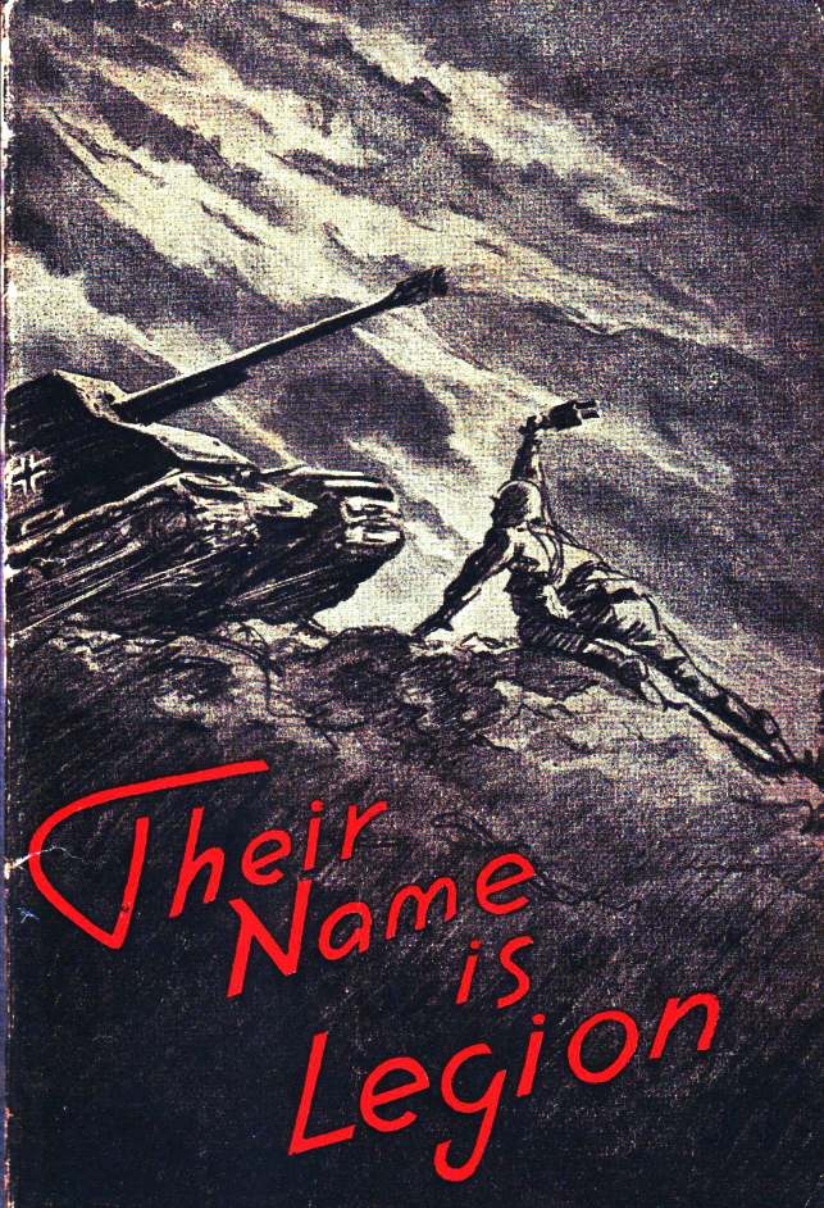
Their Name is Legion

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Every day the Soviet press carries reports of extraordinarily heroic deeds performed by plain Soviet people in the fight to free their native land from the fascist invaders. These are not works of fiction or art but simple facts related by eye-witnesses or men and women who are themselves in active service. They are authentic accounts about actual people, real places and definite dates.

It is a number of these accounts that the publishers have compiled in this book. The heroic feats accomplished by Soviet people are practically innumerable. Such feats have ceased to be exceptional acts performed by exceptional individuals. They have become mass phenomena on the part of rank-and-file Soviet fighting men whose name is legion.

We have selected only a few of the most typical episodes that have appeared in the Soviet press, and are publishing them in book form with the object of acquainting our reader with the Soviet soldier.

Moscow 1945

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EVEN IN DEATH

We do not know how the man who performed this heroic deed lived. We only know how his life ended. . . . With a voice that had grown hoarse, the Staff telephone operator vainly tried to establish connections with the unit holding a forward position some distance away. The enemy was surrounding this unit and it was necessary to get in touch with the latter immediately in order to inform it of the enemy flanking movement and to transmit the order of the Command Post to withdraw to another zone. Otherwise the unit would be wiped out. . . . It was impossible to get to the advance position. German trench mortars were raking the area separating the Command Post from it, sending fountains of snow and earth into the air.

But the line was dead!

"Must be broken," said the telephone operator.

It was then that Sergeant Novikov, who only the day before had played out this line under fire, stood up, threw on his camouflage coverall, took his rifle and bag of instruments, and said quite simply:

"I'll go. There's a break. May I?"

The telephone line passed through an area thinly overgrown with underbrush and scattered fir trees. Novikov crawled off. The Germans soon spotted him. A snowy maelstrom of explosions began to move towards the

signalman. Hot fragments of mortar bombs wailed over his head unpleasantly.

He did not feel the pain in his right side, but on looking round he saw a fine red trail dragging after him along the snow. When he had crawled some three hundred metres he found one severed end of the line buried under clods of earth. The line had been cut by a mine that had fallen nearby. Now he had to find the other end of the severed line, which had been flung aside by the explosion, and establish contact again.

An explosion roared quite close to Novikov. A pain that seemed to weigh a ton pounced on him and pinned him to the ground. Somehow he managed to dig his way out of the earth that had showered down on him, but he could not rid himself of the pain which continued to weigh him down. But there was only one thought in his head: he had to find the end of the line that was hanging somewhere in the bushes, had to make his way to it, grasp it, drag it down and splice the ends. And he found it. As he stood up, a burning pain seared his chest and he sprawled out. But he got to his hands and knees again and seized the dangling end of the wire. Just then he saw a group of Germans approaching. He could not use his rifle to defend himself as his hands were occupied. . . . Crawling off he dragged the wire after him until he reached the other loose end.

It was getting harder and harder for him to breathe. His fingers were growing numb. . . . He was utterly disgusted with himself. Would he actually give out before splicing the line? He clamped his teeth on one end and exerting himself to the utmost pulled the other end with both hands towards his mouth. Just one more centimetre! His sight was already failing him. With a last desperate jerk he managed to get the other end between his teeth, clenching his jaws until they hurt. His tongue felt the familiar sourish salty tang and a slight prickling. There was current then! Dragging up his rifle with numb

but now free hands, he fell face down into the snow, frantically gritting his teeth with his last ounce of strength. He must not open his jaws. . . . The Germans were running towards him, shouting as they came on. Raising himself for the last time, Novikov emptied his magazine at the enemy. . . .

. . . Meanwhile the telephone operator at the Command Post was shouting into the mouthpiece:

"Yes, yes! I hear you! Arina? This is Sorokal"

When the battle was over and the advance unit had attacked the German flank and broken out of encirclement after receiving the necessary orders, the signalmen who were reeling in the line came across a man who was half snowed under. He was lying on his stomach, his face buried in the snow. In his hand was a rifle and his rigid index finger had frozen on the trigger. The magazine was empty. On the snow close by lay four dead Germans.

The signalmen raised him from the ground, and the line that he had clutched between his teeth trailed out after him. Now they knew how connections had been re-established during the fighting. . . . His teeth were so tightly clenched, they had to clip the ends of the wire at the corners of his stiffened mouth. Otherwise they would not have been able to release this man who even in death had so staunchly performed his duty as signalman.

CENTRAL FRONT
Stalinsky Sokol (Stalin Falcon)
March 13, 1942

THIS HAPPENED IN SEVASTOPOL

This happened in Sevastopol, during the last days of the heroic defence of that town. The Germans had already broken into the town and held the northern and southern bays, but the last Sevastopolites were still fighting on a narrow strip of shore.

Every night small vessels would visit that shore to evacuate those of the garrison and population who had not yet left. The people boarded the ships under enemy fire, and the vessel immediately put out to sea, while those who did not manage to get aboard on that trip continued to fight off the attacking enemy as they waited for the next night.

The battery in which Boris Klementevich Melnik served was still operating, but the order had already been given to get everything ready for its destruction. After carrying out his instructions, Melnik asked for permission to go home. His wife and eleven-year-old son were still in town. They were not far off, in the stone quarries, but he was a fairly long time searching for them.

The ground was convulsed as he crawled along, resting in still smoking shell holes and ditches, searching for his family underground, in the dark shafts. His eyes were dazzled and he recognized no one. At last, without realizing himself how it happened, he came across his son.

Melnik hurried back towards the shore with his family, to the spot where the evacuation boats put in at night.

The blasts caused by the terrific explosions threw them into the air and hurled them down, dragged them over the ground and pinned them to it, showered them with earth and uncovered them again, turned them head over heels like puppies thrown into the water.

At last they reached the cliffs overlooking the shore. Melnik lowered his wife and son to the shore on a cable.

Only then did he realize what a road had been traversed by his wife, his son and himself. He shuddered with belated terror. Only then did he notice his son's pale face, pale with the pallor of one who has mastered pain and suffering, and he recalled that he had constantly been brushing earth from his son's head and shoulders. Only then did he notice the red-hot shell splinters hissing in the dry grass some ten centimetres from his

son's head. And only then did he smell the odour of seared flesh. He was aghast. It was a terrible thing bringing a child through trials that were beyond the strength of most adults.

Everyone knows what an only son means. And now all that had been storming the fortress for two hundred and fifty days had been directed against his son. . . .

Leaving his family to the care of a cook whom he knew, Melnik returned to his battery.

He was one of the last to leave the guns. The ship was due to leave at any moment and he hurried to get his wife and son on board.

Just as he was passing the end gun, he heard a groan. He groped his way towards the sound and felt around. In front of him lay the severely shell-shocked gun commander. What was he to do? Should he carry him to the ship? Time was short, and his wife and son were waiting at the seashore. . . . Should he leave him. . . .

Melnik looked out to sea. The ships were coming in. Lifting the commander onto his back, he strapped him to himself with his belt, crossed the injured man's arms around his neck and holding them down with his chin hastened towards the shore. Although the distance was not very great he ran as fast as he could, wondering how he would ever be able to manage the two things he had to do. He would either have to abandon the commander and make a dash for his family, or save the commander and leave his wife and son to the mercy of fate.

Rarely does so difficult a trial fall to the lot of a human being, but now, with the shell-shocked commander lying helplessly across Melnik's mighty shoulders, there was a sense of duty that weighed down on the gunner's shoulders together with the officer's almost lifeless body, the stern and glorious duty of a sailor, who has pledged to hold the life of his commander dearer than his own. Melnik made his way to the sheer cliffs, his chin pressed down on his chest so tightly that the knuckles of the shell-

shocked commander cracked under it, let himself down the cable hand over hand, just managed to grab hold of the mooring rope, pulled himself over the side of the cutter and fell into it with his load. . . .

Melnik recovered consciousness in the open sea. Burning Sevastopol was reflected high in the sky, like a sunset. His wife and son were not on board the ship. They had remained behind.

* * *

If the shell-shocked commander had not recovered and reported Melnik's feat, it may be that to this day no one would know what Sevastopol cost him.

SEVASTOPOL
Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)
August 15, 1943

TAKE REVENGE!

The letter was written in an unknown handwriting. The very first lines riveted Alexei Fyodorovich's attention and moved him tremendously.

"Dear soldier," began the letter. "You have never met me, nor have I ever met you. We shall never see one another and we shall never meet. But that is not important. I am a girl of seventeen. I want to live, but life is over forme. It has been trampled underfoot. I have consumption and am dying. The Germans are to blame for this.

"My home town was occupied by the enemy, and my sister and I tried to run away, but we were caught. Because I was considered good looking they handed me over to some chief of theirs. My sister was raped by the cursed Germans in front of my own eyes and then thrown into a burning house. She was eighteen. All life was ahead of her, but those fiends murdered her. I managed to escape.

I ran away in the bitter cold, half-naked and barefoot. And this is the result—consumption is eating me up alive. The memory of all that happened is too horrible. I have neither brother nor father nor anyone that is kin to me. Dear soldiers, take revenge for my sister. She had a sweetheart, but they killed him too. My hours are numbered. Take revenge!"

A postscript followed in which the girl stated that she had learned Fedotov's address from a letter she had heard read over the radio in which the gunner had told about the atrocities of the fascists.

Fedotov grit his teeth as he read the letter. Raising misty eyes from this ghastly document, he gazed out over the Don steppe. After some time he walked over to his gun with a heavy step. It was standing there ready for action, but he looked it over minutely once again, rechecked the alignment and made sure that the shells were lying to hand. Silently he looked over the gun crew.

"Tanks! Get ready to repulse the attack!" the order from the artillery post cut short the gunner's thoughts.

"Guns to operate independently," came the second command.

A black tank sped out of the ravine, crushing the briar bushes and young trees. A shot rang out. Smoke began to rise from the turret. A second, third, fourth and fifth tank were already coming out of the ravine. Fedotov took careful aim at the steel monsters, which had already come out on level ground. Manoeuvring to avoid the gunfire, they turned a little to the side and then sped forward at the battery. It looked as if nothing could stop this headlong race of death. Thundering and flashing fire, the armoured enemy was making straight for the gun. In another moment the steel caterpillars of the leading machine would crush the gun crew.

Suddenly a thermite shell burst nearby and showers of sparks rained down on Fedotov. His clothing blazed

up as he sent a shell into the breach, closed it and fired. The tank crashed over. Tongues of flame were licking Fedotov's chest and rising to his face, but he kept up his fire at the speeding tanks. His body was burning, his bones felt as if they were breaking. The pain was unbearable. He loaded his gun and fell. Just before losing consciousness he shouted for help. The men ran to their comrade's assistance. Under a hail of bullets they began to tear his flaming clothes from him.

"No, no, not that. . . ." groaned Fedotov, rising on his elbows. The sleeves of his greatcoat were smouldering. His seared hands reached for the fuse and jerked it as he fell to the ground a blazing torch. With his last shot the gunner wrecked a tank that was only forty metres away.

Behind this tank others were pushing on. Two men rushed forward with bundles of grenades and flung themselves on the ground directly in front of the fire position. Another man took Fedotov's place at the gun. Once again it thundered, sending shell after shell at the sinister machines.

And the panzers turned back. Man had conquered. Tears were streaming down the grimy face of the new gunner. On the ground lay the charred remains of Fedotov.

SOUTHERN FRONT
Izvestia
February 20, 1942

THEY LOOKED FRAIL

In October 1941 workers' battalions were formed in Moscow. Two Young Communist League members, twenty-year-old Natalia Kovsheva and eighteen-year-old Maria Polivanova, volunteered at the recruiting station of one such battalion. They asked to be sent to

the front. The Battalion Commissar refused to accept them. They looked frail and incapable of standing the rigours of military life. But the girls insisted. They said that they had trained for active service and had taken a course for sharpshooters. In the end the Commissar gave in to their entreaties and enrolled them. Natalia and Maria left for the front.

The Commissar never had cause to regret his decision. The stamina of these girls amazed even the veterans. They could lie in the snow for hours, cover dozens of kilometres on skiis and go without sleep for days. Both were dead shots.

When the girls had wiped out over three hundred Germans, they were decorated with the Order of the Red Star. Inseparable friends, both of them entered the ranks of the Communist Party on the same day.

On August 14, 1942, Natalia and Maria took part in an extremely hard-fought battle. The Germans were pushing ahead frantically. A group of Red Armymen, among them the two valiant girls, staunchly fought off the attacks, but the ranks of the gallant fighters were gradually thinning.

At last only three remained among the living: Natalia Kovsheva, Maria Polivanova and the sniper Novikov. All three were wounded. They had used up all their cartridges. The girls had only four hand grenades left. The Germans were drawing closer and closer. The girls flung a couple of grenades at them. Maria was wounded a second time and fell. Soon Natalia stretched out beside her. The fascists had already come up to them. One of them even kicked Natalia.

It was then that these gallant daughters of Moscow used their last grenades. They blew themselves up, but the grenade splinters also mowed down the Germans who surrounded them.

Not a single Hitlerite passed through the sector that had been covered by the accurately aimed fire of the

valiant Soviet fighters Kovsheva and Polivanova. Reinforcements came up in time and the unit advanced.

Natalia Kovsheva and Maria Polivanova were posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

CENTRAL FRONT

Komsomolskaya Pravda
February 18, 1943

I'VE NEVER PARTICIPATED IN SUCH AN OPERATION BEFORE EITHER

Georgi Fyodorovich Nikolaev, Army surgeon, had been an assistant professor in the Archangel Medical Institute before he had been mobilized. He was a kind, gentle person with nothing of the military about him. In a word, he was a typically civilian professional man.

. . . One winter morning a wounded man was brought to the base hospital with an unusual injury. An unexploded mortar shell was lodged in his right foot. It had pierced the felt boot and foot, but fortunately for the Red Armyman, had not exploded. The patient was in the best of spirits, drank his tea quite calmly, smoked, and only the man in the cot next to him was made somewhat uneasy by the sight of the protruding end of the shell.

The doctors conferred on the case for a long time but could not arrive at a unanimous opinion. While they were conferring, the Army surgeon came in. The others breathed a sigh of relief. True, Nikolaev had never before had occasion to deal with an unexploded shell in the course of his practice; still they had faith in him. This was a case for a sapper surgeon, so to speak.

It was, of course, possible to amputate the leg, but Nikolaev did not want to do this if it could be avoided. He sent for a sapper, and going straight to the point, as he always did, asked:

"Is it possible to operate? Won't it blow up?"

The sapper examined the shell closely, shrugged his shoulders and replied in a far from confident voice:

"It's hard to say. Maybe it won't blow up. . . ."

"I see," interrupted Nikolaev. "I'll have to operate. You'll help me. What? You've never assisted in an operation before? Well, to tell you the truth, I've never participated in such an operation before either."

The wounded man was removed with all precaution to the remotest ward and strictly enjoined not to move his leg during the operation. The unusual procedure began. The consulting sapper held the "mined" leg, Nurse Streltsova handed the surgeon his instruments, and the latter wielded his knife. The operation proceeded in layers, as it were. First, the felt boot had to be cut away, then the foot wrapping, and only then the skin. Cautiously, almost supercautiously, one might say, the surgeon enlarged the wound canal and. . . . The rest was comparatively simple. The sapper carried the mortar shell into the woods and with a shot from his rifle exploded it.

Pravda
April 16, 1942

NO ROOM TO RETREAT

German columns were pushing on Moscow. The fascists figured on breaking into the capital straight from the line of march, but in the enemy path there rose the 316th Rifle Division, now the 8th Guards Red Banner Panfilov Division.

It was a cold frosty day. The Germans were getting ready for their last spurt. Bombers sped through the sky constantly. Self-propelled guns stretched out along the snow-covered fields. Tanks were rumbling over the Volokolamsk Chausse.

Scouts had ascertained that two enemy infantry regiments, six mortar and four artillery batteries, over eighty tanks and groups of automatic riflemen and motorcyclists were concentrated in Krasikovo, Zhdanovo and Muromtsevo.

This whole avalanche of fire and steel rolled down on our defence line.

Never will history forget this glorious battle on the fields around Moscow. On that day twenty-eight heroes, headed by Political Officer Vassily Klochkov, men of Panfilov's Division, won immortality for themselves. This group of valiant men were holding the line at the railway junction of Dubosekovo. Their accurate fire mowed down the fascist tommy gunners who were advancing towards our position at full height. After repulsing several infantry attacks the twenty-eight Guardsmen were attacked by twenty armoured monsters. But the intrepid fighters never wavered. With their anti-tank guns they wrecked the German tanks and showered them with bottles filled with inflammable liquid.

Towards evening new tanks were hurled against the position of the twenty-eight. This was the second echelon of a panzer column. Political Officer Klochkov counted thirty machines, among them several heavy tanks. Bristling with fire, they advanced towards the railway junction where the twenty-eight brave men were entrenched. The ranks of the defenders grew smaller and smaller. With every moment it became harder to hold off the onslaught of the mobile armoured fortresses. It was then that Political Officer Klochkov, uttered the immortal words to his mates:

"Russia is great, but there is no room to retreat. Behind us is Moscow! . . ."

Determined to die in battle rather than retreat, the Soviet fighting men fired away at the enemy tanks and showered them with glass grenades. A dozen tanks were already wrecked and in flames, but the number of the

NATALIA KOVSHEVA and MARIA POLIVANOVA
Heroes of the Soviet Union

POLITICAL OFFICER KLOCHKOV
Hero of the Soviet Union, with His Family

Soviet fighting men was also decreasing. Soon their ammunition gave out.

Clutching his last bundle of grenades, Political Officer Klochkov dashed forward to encounter the nearest German tank. The steel monster was halted. But the dauntless hero fell too, riddled by bullets.

Thus it was that the twenty-eight heroes of the Panfilov Division fought against fifty German tanks on that day. Fighting against such heavy odds, they died the death of heroes, but the enemy tanks did not pass. The news of their heroic feat soon spread throughout the country and the names of these valiant Soviet men became immortal.

CENTRAL FRONT
Komsomolskaya Pravda
November 17, 1942

BECAUSE I AM HUMAN THOUGHT

Snezhkov was a famous bacteriologist from the South. A whole world of invisible beings had been discovered by him, and in this world he felt himself complete master. He was famous and his appearance was that of a famous man.

He was ill when the Germans occupied the city where he lived and did not manage to get away.

"Look here, Maria Petrovna," he said to his old aunt, "the Germans want to send me to Germany to work. What do you think of that, eh?"

His aunt's only reply was to cross herself.

"You don't like it," said the professor, obviously pleased. "Neither do I. Now here is what I would like you to do for me. I want you to sew me a belt like this."

On a bit of paper Professor Snezhkov drew a belt with a lot of narrow little tube-like pockets.

As soon as it grew dark he went to his laboratory, picked out the test-tubes containing his most valuable cultures of microbes and put them in the belt. I do not know what cultures these were. I only know that he had worked on some of them for a number of years and was close to a discovery that should have rid mankind forever of one of the most pernicious epidemic diseases.

Late that night he put on this belt and left the house. His plans were quite simple: to make his way to the guerilla fighters and send his valuable belt with them to our lines.

A thousand hazards beset his path, but from sunset to sunrise he continued on his way East, where life was.

On and on he walked, and the clothing in which he had left home gradually turned to rags, while his mane of grey hair became matted with dust. In one village he changed his tattered shoes for bast sandals, in another his knapsack for a patched blouse.

He had already left the steppeland and was making his way through the woods. Orel was not far off. His feet had long since been bruised to blood and his heart troubled him. Once he sat down beside a stream to rest and evidently fainted, for when he came to he was lying with his head in the water.

"I'm in a bad way," he muttered to himself as he got up.

At last the day came when he felt that he could not hold out any longer. He was aghast at the thought that together with him his work, which the world needed, would be lost.

No longer hiding, he entered a big village in the daytime. He knew that there was a hospital there.

"Good day, doctor," he said to the frail little woman in the white smock.

"How do you do, Granddad! Where are you from?"

"I've come a long way," said the professor and sat

down. "I have confidential business with you, doctor. I don't know you, but you are Russian and a doctor. That is sufficient. Here is what I want to tell you. . . ."

It was decided that he would remain with Doctor Klitina for several days. It was a risky matter. The Germans were keeping a watch on her, and the traitor of a village elder had carried tales more than once. The patients had seen the professor come and had seen the doctor take him home with her from the hospital. But all he had to do was to leave the belt with her and go. This is what they decided to do at the first sign of danger.

They came for him at night. He was sleeping in the lean-to. Unhurriedly he got up and removed his belt. Pushing aside the rubbish piled up in one corner he put his belt on the floor, placed a few broken saw horses over it as a barrier and on top of this threw everything that was at hand. Then he went out.

He does not recall what followed as clearly, although it seemed to him that he was in full possession of his senses. He was taken somewhere, stumbled, fell and immediately tried to get up, because he was being kicked on the ground. For some reason the Commandant ordered that he be stripped, and for a long time he stood there naked, trying to master the pain that clutched at his heart and left arm. But at this point he got a grip on himself. The Germans were shouting at him and talking things over among themselves in loud voices. He listened to what they had to say and suddenly began to speak himself in excellent German.

"What are you threatening me with?" asked the professor with contempt. "Here I am standing in front of you, a naked man, yet your tanks and cannon mean nothing to me. That is because I am human thought, I am Russia. You want to kill me, do you? Your arms are too short. Even though you slay me, yet you shall not slay me. I spit at you, fools that you are!"

Suspecting that he was an important member of a guerilla detachment, the Germans sent him off to Orel. For three months he lay in a filthy cellar among other dying Russians. It was there that we found him. He was still alive when we took him out of the cellar and carried him to a hospital. The first word he uttered when he came to himself was the name of the village in which he had left his belt. And the belt was found and brought to him.

He died after leaving his disciples detailed instructions on how to continue the work he had begun. Before he died he told me what I have set down here. . . .

OREL
Izvestia
September 16, 1943

THE GERMAN BOMBER WENT HURTLING TO THE GROUND

First Lieutenant Garam of the Guards, Hero of the Soviet Union, was one of five Soviet fighter pilots raiding an enemy aerodrome. A group of German fighter planes appeared, and nine Messerschmitts attacked Garam.

One of them came at him from above. Garam shot up abruptly to encounter the German head-on. When the Messerschmitt took evasive action, flattening out of its dive and turning aside, Garam planted an accurate burst in it and the German crashed to the ground.

Meanwhile a second Messerschmitt had stolen onto the tail of the Soviet fighter. When you ask an airman: "How do you feel during a fight?" he replies: "Your neck hurts because you have to keep turning your head around all the time." It is necessary to keep a constant look-out over a circumference of 360°. Garam had already spotted the second German as he was emerging from his

FIRST LIEUTENANT GARAM
Hero of the Soviet Union

A Valiant Nurse

first encounter. He immediately veered round and flew at the Messerschmitt. As he went for the German aircraft, he peppered it with one of his accurate bursts and the second German plane crashed.

The third Nazi plane that tried to take a hand in this dog-fight followed the first two.

The rest streaked off for home, and Garam, who had used up all his ammunition, set his course for base. Suddenly he encountered a Junkers-88, and this at a time when he hadn't a single shell or a single cartridge.

Without a moment's hesitation, Garam rammed the Junkers, and the next instant the German bomber went hurtling to the ground with its tail slashed off.

Izvestia
August 5, 1942

THE ENEMY PILLBOX SPAT FORTH LEAD

A scout platoon was advancing in front of the other units. At the very outset an enemy machine gun barred their road. Sergeant-Major Alexei Pecherskikh crawled ahead to the machine gun and flung a grenade. Inspired by his example, the men quickly caught up to him.

At the height of the offensive our men were held up by a unit of Germans entrenched on the crest of a hill. The enemy pillbox spat forth lead. The machine-gun and tommy-gun fire was so concentrated that the scouts were pinned to the ground. Behind them our tommy gunners also hugged the ground. German mortars and cannon opened fire from the depths. The whole field reared up in clods of earth and clouds of smoke.

"What the hell! Are we going to lie flat here in front of this damned pillbox until the second flood?" exclaimed Pecherskikh furiously, his eyes flashing with rage.

"I'm going ahead," he said and crawled off.

The Germans spotted him almost immediately and directed their machine-gun fire at him. But Pecherskikh crawled quickly and was almost at his goal.

"He'll never make it! Those swine will get him!" muttered the Lieutenant. He thought that Pecherskikh wanted to get at the Germans with his grenades. At that very instant Pecherskikh jumped to his feet and in two bounds had reached the embrasure of the pillbox and covered it with his body.

They say that everything has its limit. But after this the fury of the Soviet fighting men knew no bounds. Not a single one of the enemy left that hill alive.

NORTHWEST OF STALINGRAD
Komsomolskaya Pravda
November 5, 1942

SHE BROUGHT LIFE BACK TO THEM

One of our advance companies had fought its way into a village, but after an encounter with German tanks was obliged to withdraw. Several wounded men remained lying on the street and in the orchards. The Germans who occupied the village coolly proceeded to kill the wounded men in full view of the local population.

Two wounded men, Sergeant Pavel Veselov and Private Alexander Skripin, were lying amidst the sunflowers just behind the house in which the Krivchinov family lived. Sophia Krivchinova decided to save them. She brought them into the storeroom of her house, put them on feather beds and piled up all sorts of rubbish in front of the door.

Unfortunately, a German tank crew was billeted in her house, separated from the wounded men by a thin wall and Sophia could bring food to the latter only at night, when the Germans were asleep.

One day soon after, one of the villagers set fire to a German ammunition dump. The Germans were beside themselves with rage. They shot whomever of the villagers they came across in their first fit of fury. The rest were ordered to leave the village.

Before going off, Sophia managed to leave some bread, cucumbers, and pickled tomatoes with the wounded men. Only when she was already out of the village did she suddenly remember to her horror that she had forgotten to leave them any water.

Late that night this elderly woman made her way through ditches and orchards and paths familiar since childhood to the enemy-occupied village, slipped past the sentries and came to her house. She climbed in through the attic window and left some water with the wounded men. This deed meant death by hanging if she were caught, but never for a moment did she think of the danger to herself. She thought only of the two Red Army-men whose names she had not even learned, but who were as dear to her at that moment as her own children.

Then she made her way across the front to one of our units and began to urge the unit commander to take back the village where her wounded men were lying, and to do so as quickly as possible. Since this was in line with his own plans, he promised to do so. He questioned her in detail as to the number of Germans there and where they were posted, and in the morning his battalion, led by Sophia Krivchinova, broke into the village.

Fighting was still raging, bullets were still whistling and explosions were shaking the little wooden houses, but Sophia Krivchinova had already made her way home, pulled away the rubbish in the corridor, opened the door and let in sun and air, bringing back life to the wounded men.

Pravda
October 31, 1942

The mailed fist of the fascists could not smash through the line at the approaches to Sevastopol. This line was held by five stout-hearted men: Political Officer Nikolai Filchenko, Seamen Vassili Tsibulko, Yuri Parshin, Ivan Krasnoselsky and Daniel Odintsov.

After a respite of several hours tanks appeared again. There were fifteen of them, which meant three tanks per man. The sailors were faced with an unequal duel.

The tanks were pressing on our trenches. They were drawing closer and closer. The sailors exchanged glances and embraced in a silent farewell. The tanks were quite close now. A machine gun tacked away. The driver of the leading tank was killed by an accurate burst. Seaman Tsibulko, the machine gunner, jumped up and threw a bundle of grenades under the second tank. There was a deafening explosion and the tank came to a halt. Tsibulko seized his arm. He had been wounded. But this was no time to bother about himself. Ignoring the pain, he continued to fire pointblank at the tanks.

. . . The last bullet had been fired. There was no more ammunition for the machine gun. Dashing out from behind the mound which had sheltered him, the wounded sailor rushed forward with a bundle of grenades and flung it under the track of a tank. The machine blew up, but an enemy bullet got Tsibulko, wounding him fatally. He fell to the ground unconscious. Ivan Krasnoselsky was killed. With his last grenades he had set fire to two enemy tanks.

Now only three Black Sea sailors remained in action. With all their ammunition exhausted and all the bottles of combustibles gone, they had only a few hand grenades left. They could have flung these under the tanks and withdrawn, but Soviet seamen do not run from the field of battle and do not surrender. They prefer to die like heroes.

Political Officer Filchenko picked up his grenades and

tied them to his belt. His face was calm. He did not utter a word to his comrades, but they understood without words. Parshin and Odintsov mutely followed his example.

The first to throw himself under a tank was Political Officer Filchenko. Odintsov and Parshin set their jaws. They saw the tank explode on the body of their comrade.

But the sailors did not hesitate, did not adandon their decision. Silently pressing one another's hand, they rushed forward and flung themselves under the tanks.

Two more explosions reverberated through the steppe.

In this encounter the five seamen destroyed ten tanks. The enemy infantry scattered. A unit of Soviet marines came up just then and, pursuing the fascists, wiped out the panic-stricken Hitlerites with bullets, bayonets and grenades. The enemy offensive was smashed.

When the battle was over, the sailors found Seaman Tsibulko, not far from a blown-up enemy tank. He was bleeding to death. With his last breath, he related how his four heroic comrades had died. Tsibulko, the fifth hero, died in the arms of the sailors.

BLACK SEA FLEET
Pravda
May 16, 1942

A SISTER

A girl came into the dugout, followed by two orderlies carrying a badly wounded commander on a stretcher. Behind walked Political Officer Milgramm of the medical company. She said something to the girl and the latter disappeared into the black gloom of the October night.

Among the immortal Stalin falcons, the memory will ever be green of this man who considered his death a blow at the enemy.

Pravda

July 10, 1941

HE HAD BEEN GIVEN UP FOR DEAD

The bridge in the enemy rear had to be blown up. It loomed up like a dense shadow, even darker and heavier than the shadow of the river and the blackness of the night.

In the middle of the bridge were neatly placed boxes of dynamite. Sergei Shershavin was crawling away, unwinding a cord as he went.

"Time!"

The sapper hesitated the fraction of a second and suddenly jerked the cord. Shershavin could not so much see as guess his movement in the darkness. Both men involuntarily held their breath in anticipation of what would follow the next minute. But there was no explosion. The silence was so unexpected that it seemed to ring in the men's ears.

Quickly Shershavin crawled back towards the bridge. He was quite close to it when the right bank suddenly came to life. Snatches of conversation came from there followed by the muffled tramping of boots over the planks of the bridge. The dynamite was lying in the middle of the bridge, the least bit closer to Shershavin. Stumbling over the body of the German sentry whom he had killed just a little earlier, he ran forward to encounter the Germans. As he ran he took a spare stick of dynamite from his pocket. He had a hazy impression of shouting and the rat-tat-tat of a tommy-gun burst, but his entire attention was centred solely on what he was about to do. Falling flat he snatched up the defective explosive,

CAPTAIN GASTELLO
Hero of the Soviet Union

Guerilla Fighter

planted the new stick of dynamite and running back a few paces, jerked the cord.

Something huge and blinding filled his whole being, something bigger than himself, something that could not fit into his body, and then everything vanished.

. . . He came to his senses all at once. Immediately he recalled everything and was amazed at the fact that he was still alive. Everything was black before his eyes, but it was not because it was night. He tried to raise his eyelids, but they would not obey him. He tried to lift his arm and a sharp pain stabbed him. His clothing was shredded in many places and the flesh on his chest was all slashed. His legs were in the water. He could not move them, they were so numb. His swollen face was huge and puffy, and instead of eye sockets there seemed to be round cushions.

Groping around he discovered that the ground in front of him rose steeply, which meant that the blast of the explosion had thrown him onto the right bank.

He slipped into the water, crawled back onto the opposite shore and then began to figure out what to do next.

With his thumb and index finger he forced open the eyelid of his right eye, but it was just as dark. His left eye, however, was still sensitive to light. Crouching down on his haunches and keeping his left eyelid open with his fingers he began to turn round in a circle slowly. A sharp ray of light pierced his pupil. He had discovered the position of the sun. Since the grass was still thickly coated with dew he knew that it was morning. Now he could continue on his way. Pulling himself along with the aid of the bushes he took his bearings by the sun.

Crawling in this manner through the shrubbery and then over bare sand, he made his way through several gulleys and ravines.

Suddenly something pricked his forehead. Barbed wire entanglements. He forced up the bottom wire and

squeezed his body under. He was now crawling over open terrain. His movements became slow and cautious. Before continuing, he would pass his hand lightly over the grass in front of him. Suddenly his hand stopped short. Hidden in the grass was a little peg. A fine wire extended from it. A mine. Carefully he picked his way around the peg. He knew from experience the intervals at which the Germans planted mines, and even though the danger was now greater than anything he had been through as yet, he continued on his way carefully, calculatingly and unerringly.

According to his calculations he should now be somewhere not far from friendly lines. After crawling through a small gulley he stumbled over a telephone line. No more than fifteen or twenty metres now separated him from the Soviet lines. But at this point, when he had almost reached his goal, the tension which had pulled him together into a solid, muscular ball, relaxed and his body refused to obey him.

"Comrades!..." he cried out and fainted.

The men who came running up at the cry discovered a man who was sleeping. On the unshaven face was an expression of infinite exhaustion....

* * *

It turned out that from the moment the bridge had been blown up, three days had elapsed. For three days this all but blind man had been making his way towards his own lines, and he had arrived. He had already been given up for dead and had been "posthumously" recommended for the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Lengthy and painstaking treatment restored Shershavin's eyesight and he returned to the front hale and hearty, ready for further action.

Krasnaya Zvezda
January 12, 1944

Lyubasha accompanied the eight marine scouts to the village of Krimskaya, which was in German hands. When they came to the outskirts of the village the Company Sergeant-Major said to her:

"We have a job of our own to do. As for you ... nobody'll notice you since you're wearing civilian clothes. Make your way to Headquarters and get hold of any documents you find there. Here's a grenade for you—just 'in case,' either for yourself or for any Fritzes you may have to push off. We'll meet a little way off from here, back of that willow over there. Go ahead now, and good luck to you...."

Making her way through the unfamiliar village was like groping around in the dark, but she managed to pick up a pail. Soon she came across a Rumanian officer.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm from Krimskaya."

"Where are you going?"

"Can't you see? I'm going for water."

"Where do you live?"

"Out that way."

"Isn't there any water there?"

"There is, but there's a dead horse near the well and it stinks."

"Let's see."

Sure enough there was a dead horse lying near the well to which she led him, but the Rumanian took her by the arm and brought her to Headquarters anyway.

The room into which he led her was filled with drunken officers, who were playing cards and drinking Anapa wine and Krasnodar vodka.

"A Russian dame!" the Rumanian introduced her.

A German officer poured some vodka for Lyubasha.

She managed to spill it out without being noticed. He poured her some more but this time she was rather awkward in getting rid of it and spilt some on her dress. The officer seized her by the head and poured it into her mouth forcibly.

Then the assistant to the chief took her to his room, which was in another wing. He gave her some chocolate, slipped a ring on her finger, and began dragging her over to the bed, but she pushed him away.

"I have to go out for a minute, I'll be right back," she said to him....

When she came back, he had fallen into a drunken sleep. Picking up a champagne bottle that was standing on the table, she swung it with all her might, hitting him square on the temple. The German was killed on the spot. Hastily she gathered together all the papers she found in the room, thrust them into her blouse and went out of the house.

She hid in a clump of yellow acacia in the yard and peered into the room where the officers were still playing cards, drinking and cursing. Then she left her hiding place and boldly walking into the room where the officers were sitting, leaned against the door jamb.

"Already?" the chief shouted to her clapping his hands.

"Already!" replied Lyubasha sternly. Stepping back from the doorway she hurled her grenade right under the feet of the enemy, and ran. She felt the hot blast of air from the explosion but that was all.

She stopped running only when she came to the willow, where she fell on the damp, autumn ground. The scouts had to remove the ring of the grenade from her thumb, so deeply had it cut into her flesh.

KUBAN
Izvestia
October 6, 1943

A Forward Observation Post

Sailors Moving Up

"TARGET 18! FIRE!"

The artillerymen of the X unit told of this noble death. German tanks and two battalions of infantry were attacking our positions. An artillery battery was sent to the aid of the Soviet infantry. Lieutenant Leshuk, the commander's assistant, was at a forward observation post. He had a clear picture of the scene of the battle. He saw the fascist tanks and the flashes from the German guns.

Leshuk directed the fire of the Soviet battery by telephone. One German gun had already been silenced. Three tanks were flaming on the field. Shells were bursting over the enemy soldiers.

But still the enemy pushed ahead frantically. Tanks were making straight for the observation trench. The tommy gunners were already quite close. While continuing to direct his battery, Leshuk kept up a steady fire at the besieging fascists. A tall officer who suddenly jumped up from behind a mound fell at his hand. His point-blank fire laid four enemy soldiers low. But the magazine of his automatic was soon empty and the Germans were already alongside, while two tanks were almost up to the observation trench.

"Russ, surrender!" the Germans shouted at him.

He flung his last grenade and three fascists fell in front of the breastworks. Then he gave his battery his last command in a calm, steady voice:

"Target 18! Fire!"

He heard the telephone operator at the battery repeat "Fire!" but he neither heard nor saw anything else. Shells were bursting in the trench. Wrecked tanks were flaming over the trench. German helmets and clods of reddish soil were flying into the air.

With his last words, Leshuk had directed the fire of his battery onto himself.

BRYANSK FRONT

Izvestia

December 18, 1942

While waiting for trains and en route in railway cars, twenty-five sailors of the Black Sea Fleet had become acquainted and struck up a fast friendship. They were returning from the hospital to their units. They had fought against the enemy on many fronts. Mine-layer Ivan Nikulin, for instance, had been at the Dniester, had taken part in the defence of Odessa, had fought for Kherson and in the Crimea.

Now they were riding in a boxcar on their way to the front. Suddenly the brakes were jammed on abruptly and the train shuddered to a halt. Some five metres in front of the locomotive the rails came to an end. The track had been torn up here.

Ivan Nikulin looked out of the boxcar. Fascists were running towards the train from the woods, firing as they came on.

"It's the Germans, mates!"

"What'll we do?" someone asked in an alarmed voice.

"Fight!" replied Nikulin.

But with what?

Turning round to the men, Nikulin asked:

"Do you trust me? Then do as I order. Lie down, and not a sound!"

The men did as they were ordered. The firing died down. They could hear the Germans bustling round the train.

"When they open the door, jump them and choke the life out of them," whispered Nikulin. "Anyone who manages to grab a gun will move ahead and open up at the rest of the fascists."

The door slid open and the Hitlerites swarmed into the car. The first eight were finished off by the sailors with their daggers and their fists. Arming themselves with tommy guns and grenades captured from the dead Germans, Nikulin and several other sailors accounted for

seventeen more. Within twenty minutes the skirmish was over and the enemy smashed.

The track was repaired and by noon the train left for its destination. Nikulin sent a report with the wounded engine driver to the Commandant of the nearest station informing him that an enemy paratroop party had landed and that his detachment had wiped out sixty-eight tommy gunners and taken twelve prisoner.

The destroyer detachment under the command of mine-layer Ivan Nikulin had started operations.

* * *

Many days passed. Ivan Nikulin's detachment, cut off from the main body of our forces, grew larger and stronger. Everyone in the vicinity who was capable of bearing arms, all to whom their country was dear joined it.

While making its way back to the Soviet lines, the detachment encountered a large enemy formation which was preparing to force a river. The sailors decided to disrupt the operation of the fascists, and, despite the heavy odds, engaged the enemy in battle. The Germans hurled artillery and a large number of tanks against this small detachment. Ten heavy tanks in single file were advancing along a narrow ravine at full speed towards the centre of the detachment, where Ivan Nikulin was at the time.

Tying a number of grenades around his waist, Nikulin threw himself under the leading tank. The machine was wrecked on his body. The tank behind it telescoped into the halted vehicle and came to a stop, holding up the machines behind. The tank crews, who jumped out of the machines, were wiped out by our machine-gun fire.

Pravda
August 29, 1942

At the beginning of September 1942 I was called up to the Commandant's to be sent on a job as I had not managed to hide from the police, who had tumbled to the fact that I wasn't going to work. When I came in to the Commandant's office I saw Marusya Gabelkova standing there and staring into a corner where German shells were piled up.

Walking over to her I asked:

"What are you staring at?"

She replied:

"One of these days they're going to send off these shells and a lot of them will kill our people."

Looking her straight in the eye I said:

"If only they could be blown up!"

She threw a quick glance at me and asked:

"Tell me, how can we do it?"

Turning round I noticed that more and more people were coming in all the time while the policeman had gone off somewhere. I said to Marusya:

"I'm running back home, we'll talk it over later."

But I didn't go to work after that. I sent word that I was sick, went to bed, and all the time I kept thinking about our conversation. I once heard a certain artilleryman say that if you strike the tip of a shell on iron it might blow up and then the explosion would blow up all the rest of the shells. He had told me about a case like this. I realized that nothing would remain of the person who dropped the shell, but still it was better for one person to die than a thousand.

I didn't see Marusya for some time after that, but I began to keep an eye out for the day when they would start loading those shells onto trucks to send them off, determined to go to work there on that day and carry out my intention.

Three or four days passed in this way. Suddenly I met Marusya again. She asked:

"Remember what you said?"

But at this point I began to be a little worried because I didn't know her very well and you never could tell how people might have changed under the Germans.

"I've forgotten," I said.

Then she said:

"I heard them say they're going to send off those shells tomorrow. Tell me how they can be blown up. Tell me!"

Then I said to her:

"Tomorrow morning I'm going to show up for work and while I'm loading the shells I'll drop one on the rails and they'll all blow up. Maybe the whole of Prokhorovka will blow up too."

Marusya was silent. Then she raised her head and said:

"Let me do it. You have a child and a husband somewhere, but I'm alone. I'm sick of living under the Germans, so fed up with it I'd rather die."

I looked at her in surprise. She was only a slip of a girl and I felt sorry for her.

"No, Marusya," I said, "this is no joke. You're young yet and you must live. Your whole future is ahead of you. It's better that I should do what I thought of."

She looked at me with angry eyes and said:

"I'm going to do it anyway and there's no sense in two of us dying."

I remember we were standing near an apple tree. She picked a couple of blades of grass and suggested:

"Let's draw. Whoever pulls the longest blade goes."

She drew the longest.

"There you are!" she exclaimed with a smile.

We said goodbye and she went home. I felt terrible, both ashamed for myself and sorry for Marusya.

On September 13, 1942, I got up early in the morning and looked out of the window. Empty freight cars

were standing on the track. They were waiting to be loaded with shells. People were already going to work. Eight o'clock. Going on nine. They had begun to load the shells. I was very much upset at not having gone. I thought that Marusya had most likely funked it.

Thinking this I ran to the station. Suddenly I heard a deafening explosion, followed by others. Everyone was running and shouting. It is impossible to describe the horrible nightmare that lasted for about three hours while the shells were bursting and everything at the station was blazing. Later the charred bodies of a lot of German swine were picked up on the track....

So this is what our Marusya did, and to this day I can't forgive myself for letting her have her way and take my place.

PROKHOROVKA
PROKHOROVSKY DISTRICT, KURSK REGION
Komsomolskaya Pravda
May 18, 1943

WITHOUT A DROP OF FUEL

Serzhantov's aircraft had been hit and the fuel was leaking out of the riddled gasoline tank. He had only enough fuel left to get him back to base and he should have made for home.

Meanwhile Pilot Baranov, who was fighting in another section, had set fire to two German planes and rammed a third. After the ramming he had to bale out. As his parachute was slowly floating down to the ground, three enemy aircraft made for the helpless pilot. If not for Serzhantov, Baranov would have been killed.

On catching sight of the three Messerschmitts hovering over Baranov like vultures, Serzhantov changed his course and rushed at the enemy. He knew that if he used up

his fuel in this encounter he would be unable to reach base, but he did not hesitate for a moment. Engaging the enemy and covering his comrade, he set fire to one enemy aircraft and sent it crashing to the ground, drawing off the other two Germans after him and thus making it possible for Baranov to reach ground and get away.

This cost Serzhantov dear. His fuel was at a catastrophically low level, but he continued to engage the enemy. He was wounded in the head by a splinter, but still he fought on. German bullets smashed his arm, but still he fought. Another German aircraft blazed up and crashed to the ground.

Now he had only one Messerschmitt to deal with, but the Soviet pilot himself no longer had either the strength or the means to continue fighting. Both he and his machine were crippled and his last fuel tank was almost dry. Both the man and the machine had been used to the limit.

With fast failing consciousness, on a rocking plane with a smashed water system, he rushed into another attack, which was really more demonstrative than dangerous. But his onslaught was so furious that the enemy, who could easily have downed him now, turned tail and fled.

He had won the battle, saved a comrade and downed two enemy aircraft. Now he should have made a landing immediately. But the enemy might notice him coming down and realizing that he was no longer able to fight, return and calmly shoot him up on the ground. He had to stay in the air a few more minutes, and these were the most difficult moments of all. Only when the enemy was lost to sight did Serzhantov come down, without an ounce of strength, without a drop of fuel.

Pravda
May 26, 1943

The infuriated Cossacks sent round after round of machine-gun and automatic-rifle fire into the Germans, showering the enemy trenches with grenades and shouting furiously:

"Take that, you dogs, for our Yerokhin!"

. . . Granddad Yerokhin had come to the unit as a volunteer. Naturally no one thought that a sixty-year-old man would fight with arms in hand. When they accepted Yerokhin into their unit, the Cossacks figured that he would take care of the horses and the fodder and talk to the young men around the campfire of an evening during lulls, telling them about his experiences. But during their very first battle everyone realized that there was no hope whatever of keeping Granddad back in the second echelon.

"Listen here, what's the idea of trying to insult an old man? Think I've come here as a watchboy or something? I've come to fight the Germans!"

From that time on Granddad not only kept up with the younger men, but often outdid them.

"Lively there, youngsters!" he would urge on the Cossacks.

And the Cossacks would plunge ahead like an avalanche.

Yerokhin's voice always rang out heartily through the din of the fighting, and in the last battle of Yerokhin's life he shouted eagerly as he clambered up a steep incline:

"Forward! Hurry up!"

The men who had been shivering with cold, flared up. Mortar bombs were bursting. Streams of hot air and stifling smoke seared their faces. Shell splinters and bullets whistled piercingly. Wounded and killed came tumbling down the hill like felled trees. But the living kept pushing forward, outstripping death.

"Where are you pushing to?! You're crawling right into a pillbox, you son-of-a-bitch!" Granddad bawled

out Stephan Sukharev, who had been fighting at Yerokhin's side during the whole of this encounter. "You make for that place over there, over there, I tell you! I'm speaking to you! . . ."

A few seconds later and everyone saw Granddad at the top of the cliff. He was sitting astride a rock as if it were a horse and pointing out the way to the Cossacks with gestures. From this position he had an excellent view of the enemy firing points.

The Germans were so taken aback at the sight of the old man with the flowing white beard directly in front of them, that for several seconds they left him alone.

"This way! This way!" Yerokhin was shouting meanwhile, clutching his carabine in his left hand and swinging his right.

But the Germans had already trained their tommy guns on him. The dry autumn leaves rustled as they were carried along by the body of the old man, which was rolling down to the foot of the hill. . . .

His comrades gave him a military burial right on the field of battle. And who knows, maybe the fury with which they fought played a decisive role in the heavy fighting for the commanding height, which ended in our victory.

NORTHEAST OF TUAPSE
Izvestia
November 15, 1942

AN UNPARALLELED DUEL

Three columns of tanks were advancing over the steppes. At least thirty machines were making straight for the battery. The gunners let them come up quite close, so close that they could see the faces of the German officers who were looking out of the hatches. And the steppe,

which until now had silently allowed the enemy columns to pass over it, suddenly roared and groaned. Guns were firing deafeningly.

The hatches of the German tanks were slammed to and the iron muzzles of their cannon spat forth fire in return. Three guns against thirty tanks!

Sergeant Alekantsev had eyes and ears for nothing but the fight. He gave the orders and the guns fired at the tanks. . . .

More than ten wrecked panzers were already blazing on the slope of the hill when Alekantsev discovered that the guns to the right and left of him had been damaged, while their crews had either been killed or wounded. His gun with its crew of Young Communist League members was the only one left. It was quite clear that the Germans would now concentrate on the remaining gun.

Sure enough eighteen German tanks soon appeared over the crest of the hill.

Alekantsev decided to fight. He ordered his crew to bring the gun out onto a little hill so as to make sure of the aim.

"We'll fire pointblank!"

The duel began. The first three shots disabled three German tanks. Two blazed up and one was brought to a halt by a direct hit. German shells were bursting around the gun. Showers of earth buried the men. Shell splinters beat a tattoo on the empty shell cases. One German shell burst only a few metres behind the crew. Three of the gunners, Mamot, Pchelkin and Shankin, fell.

The two remaining men, Alekantsev and Gustav Votz, set fire to three more German tanks and crippled two others. The last tank they had hit was blazing away only a few score metres from the gun. Suddenly Votz fell too, seriously wounded.

Alekantsev now remained alone with his gun. Could he have imagined at dawn that day that his first battle would turn out like this? Could he have dreamed

that he would have to substitute for a whole gun crew and fight so long as the gun remained in working order, so long as there were still shells, so long as his young heart still beat in his breast? But he was not afraid. His one desire was to stop the tanks on this particular sector, to keep them from advancing on Stalingrad.

The next shell he fired was wide of the mark, but the one after that hit home. The tank at the extreme left blazed up. Encouraged by this, he deftly reloaded the gun and aimed for the middle tank. The gun boomed and this tank, too, burst into flames. But there were still eight more tanks coming on, showering the bit of steppe-land where the gun stood with bullets and shells.

A sharp pain stabbed Alekantsev. A bullet had buried itself in his thigh just above the knee. Just then the third tank he had hit began to move. He worked feverishly, paying no attention to the blood that was streaming from his leg. Efficiently, without the slightest unnecessary movement, he took a shell, sent it into the breach and gave the command to himself in a loud voice:

"Fire!"

This unparalleled duel had already been going on for more than an hour. Another German tank burst into flame. The others turned back. A shell landed square on Alekantsev's gun, wrecking it. Alekantsev himself was wounded in the leg a second time by a large shell splinter.

He blew up the rest of his shells, put Votz, helpless from loss of blood, across his shoulder and crawled over the scorched grass to Regimental Headquarters.

The Soviet Information Bureau carried a report of Alekantsev's feat.

STALINGRAD
Izvestia
November 4, 1942

He was a well-built, husky lad in blue overalls. He held his head proudly and looked you straight in the eye. A fine lad was Misha Silnitsky, and everyone in Danila's guerilla detachment liked him.

One day Misha did the job of a whole detachment all by himself. He was sent to a village to reconnoitre and to ascertain the number of Germans there. Approaching the village from the direction of the cemetery, he opened up with his machine gun and routed some two score Germans from the place.

The enemy set out to hunt down the guerillas. They advanced on the village in a dense column of about six hundred men or more. The guerillas broke up into small parties, and set ambushes in several spots near the village, in the village itself and beyond it. Misha, who was very highly thought of, was entrusted with one of the most important tasks. He was assigned to the house at the end of the village and told to let the Germans come up as close as possible before opening fire.

Misha took his machine gun up to the roof of the end house, dragged up a supply of ammunition sufficient to last him through the whole engagement, and settled down to wait.

Meanwhile the German punitive detachment was advancing towards the village, the head of the column swaying from side to side like the head of a snake crawling through reeds. At last the road stopped winding and the grey horde came out on a straight stretch of road. They were devilishly near, no more than a hundred or a hundred and fifty metres away.

It was a very tense moment and a great strain on Misha's nerves to keep his finger from pressing the trigger, not to begin firing too early. When only twenty metres remained and the enemy could not be allowed to come any closer, when it was quite clear that will power and reason

were indeed stronger than the instinct of self-preservation, Misha opened fire and shouted something at the Germans, and to Danila, whom he did not see. The Germans began to fall like leaves, while the machine gun trembled in Misha's hands, and the Germans kept falling and rushing about without knowing where to run, crashing into each other and falling again. . . .

There was no one left to aim at. Fifty corpses were strewn on the ground, the wounded were trying to crawl off, while the rest had scattered and were firing from under cover. A regular battle flared up. The fighting was long-drawn-out and heavy. When all was said and done the Germans were far superior numerically and their ammunition, which they had brought up on carts, was much more plentiful than the supply the guerillas had carried up on themselves. The fighting lasted for seven hours, until evening. By then one hundred and fifty Germans had been killed and about two hundred wounded. The guerillas' ammunition was almost exhausted and they were obliged to withdraw.

Misha remained on his roof to cover the retreat of the other guerillas. He still had some ammunition and he kept his machine gun flashing between his own men and the enemy like a dagger cutting through the air.

The guerillas withdrew to the forest, where it would be impossible for the Germans to get at them, while Misha held the enemy at bay until the dark green maw of the forest had swallowed up all his comrades. Only then did he climb down from the roof with his machine gun and make for the woods himself. He hurried as fast as he could with his load, but an explosive bullet hit him in the leg and he fell. The guerillas could no longer protect him. They were out of ammunition and could do nothing.

Meanwhile the Germans surrounded him. They drew closer slowly, afraid to come up to him. There was no telling what this daring young man with the machine

gun would do. Most likely he had grenades at his belt or simply explosives, or something else of the sort. They took small timorous steps, terrified of this lone, wounded, helpless man lying there with a smashed leg. But then they saw the gaping wound and the thick, dark pool on the ground, saw the yellowish pallor of the skin from which the blood had drained, and they grew bolder. This was no longer someone whom they need fear. They could take him prisoner, question him and then torture him to death.

The enemy circle closed in around him and the Germans were already putting out their hands to seize him when he jumped up. His lips were parched and pressed in a tight line while his eyes were fixed and stubborn. Just as the enemy was about to seize him, his hand flashed out with a dagger and a German fell dead. They shouted to him to surrender and once again he hit out with his dagger, and another German fell to the ground. He would not let himself be taken alive by the Nazis, and he wounded still another. . . .

And then a shot rang out and a bullet pierced the heart of the young man in the blue overalls. He fell dead, but he had not surrendered.

Mikhail Silnitsky was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Izvestia
July 5, 1942

HE DID NOT LOOK FOR A WAY OUT

A squadron of planes under Guards Lieutenant Kotlov set out to head off a raid of enemy aircraft. The enemy planes were intercepted and a fierce dog-fight ensued. During the encounter a new group of fifty Junkers and fifteen Focke-Wulf and Messerschmitt fighters

appeared a short distance away. There was a danger that this group would get away with pounding a certain Soviet objective with impunity. Thereupon Lieutenant Kotlov and his partner Second Lieutenant Grachev streaked off to intercept this group. Swooping into the midst of the fascist aircraft they shot down one of the Junkers. Immediately at least ten enemy fighters swooped down on our two fighters. Second Lieutenant Grachev's plane was downed, but meanwhile Kotlov had managed to send two Messers to the ground. Even though he was alone, he did not look for a way out of the fight. On the contrary, he flew in among the German bombers, downed one of them and broke up the formation of the others.

Just then an enemy shell tore off Kotlov's leg right above the knee. The pain was excruciating, but he kept firing away and sent his fifth enemy plane in this dogfight crashing. His plane had become unmanageable and Kotlov exerted his last bit of strength to bale out. He was picked up on the ground by our infantrymen and carried off as tenderly as a sacred vessel.

Izvestia
August 15, 1943

MOTHER AND SON

I do not know whether this letter will reach Moscow. I very much hope it does. I want everyone to know about this thing that literally stunned every one of us. . . .

It happened in January. We do not know the details, we can only guess at them. We found the body of Comrade Andrei, the dearly beloved Commissar of our detachment, lying in the snow. He was all bandaged up. Somewhat nearer to our camp, we found the body of his mother, frozen stiff on the snow. In her hand was a packet of field

reports written in the unsteady but well-known handwriting of Comrade Andrei. In addition we saw trails, the trails of the son and the mother. These trails helped us figure out what had taken place.

Andrei had gone off on an extremely important reconnoitring mission, on the results of which much depended. He had collected extremely valuable information, but unfortunately had been seriously wounded. He could have remained in the village with his mother, but he knew that the information he had collected was very much needed by the detachment, besides which he wanted to suggest how this information should be used.

And so the two of them set out on foot for our camp. They made very slow and difficult progress. Most likely the mother led the son, helping him along with her last ounce of strength. But then Andrei sank heavily to the snow. He could not go any further. The mother sat down beside him. Most likely she tended to her son and kept his spirits up, but Andrei kept thinking of how essential it was for us to get this information. It must have been there, right in the snow, that he wrote his report with a failing hand, passing it on to his mother. Without a doubt it was hard for her to leave her dying son. But she realized no less than Andrei that we were waiting for the results of the reconnaissance.

And she left him. . . .

She nearly reached her goal. But the frost was so bitter and her clothing so flimsy. . . . Just before evening of the second day we found her lying dead on the snow. She had fallen face down, one hand clutching the little packet of papers.

We buried the mother and son on the high bank of the Dnieper early in the morning. The bright sunrays played over the snow and it looked as if everything round about was encrusted with silver which had been set with billions of diamonds. The glorious banner of our guerilla detachment, riddled with so many bul-

MIKHAIL SILNITSKY
Hero of the Soviet Union

At the Enemy Tank!

lets, was brought up and dipped over the grave and a salute rang out.

As soon as the small mound had grown up over the grave, the command rang out:

"Forward, comrades! We must take revenge on the enemy!"

We set off to wipe out the German garrison in the hamlet of B., making use of the valuable information that Andrei had collected. The Germans were surrounded and wiped out.

THE X GUERILLA CAMP

Komsomolskaya Pravda
March 21, 1943

BEHIND US IS STALINGRAD

After an exhausting two-day march, sixteen Guardsmen dug in on the slope of a hill in the vicinity of Stalingrad. They were in a tight fix. A large concentration of enemy infantry could be seen not far off and it was possible that tanks would appear.

There was no time to rest. The Guardsmen dug in hastily and made ready to encounter the enemy. As soon as it began to grow light, German tanks appeared on the crest of a nearby hill. There were twelve of them. Twelve tanks against sixteen men. The forces were indeed not matched, especially since the only weapons the Guardsmen had against the panzers were grenades. They had no anti-tank guns.

Vassili Kochetkov, the nineteen-year-old platoon commander, had been badly wounded on the previous day. He was as weak as a kitten from loss of blood, but his will power was still strong.

"We are Guardsmen," he said to his men, "and members of the Young Communist League. We must stop the tanks

at all costs. Remember the Panfilov men. They did not let the tanks pass, because behind them was Moscow. We also have nowhere to retreat. Behind us is Stalingrad. . . ."

The German caterpillars rumbled deafeningly. Grenades went flying to meet the tanks. Explosions roared. The Guardsmen had aimed well. Two German tanks skidded round and halted, but the rest continued to advance. Shells and bullets rained down on the trenches. One after the other the Guardsmen were being disabled. Their ranks were growing smaller and smaller. Would their nerves be able to stand it? Would they have the strength? Might not some coward show up among them and spoil everything?

Suddenly a young, smooth-faced Red Armyman jumped up from the trench with an anti-tank grenade in his hand. Boldly, without the slightest hesitation, he threw himself under the caterpillars of a German tank. A fearful explosion roared. The hero perished, but the Germans had paid dearly for his life: a third German tank had been put out of commission.

This boundlessly heroic feat inspired all the others and imbued them with new strength. The Guardsmen jumped out of their trenches and rushed forward to encounter the tanks, showering them with grenades. New explosions blazed. A fourth tank halted.

The Germans still had eight panzers. Vassili Kochetkov was so weakened by loss of blood that he could not stir. Scarcely able to raise his head he looked round to see how many Guardsmen were still in the ranks. Three. Only three against eight tanks.

It looked as though the situation were hopeless and the Germans would surely break through. But in face of the plucky fight put up by this handful of gallant men, the crews of six German tanks turned their vehicles back and withdrew. Only two panzers continued to push forward. Thereupon the three remaining men, Vassili

Chirkov, Mikhail Stepanevka and Mikhail Shuktomov, snatched up grenades and following the example of their comrades threw themselves under the tracks of the machines. . . .

Thus ended this unparalleled encounter. The mortally wounded platoon commander, Vassili Kochetkov, described the battle to his comrades, who reached this zone only when the fighting was over. He also told them of the request made by his glorious comrades just before the battle: to enroll them in the ranks of the Communist Party.

STALINGRAD FRONT
Komsomolskaya Pravda
October 14, 1942

RAM HIM!

Heavy German counter-attacks had begun west of Kiev. The unit in which Ivan Goreshnak served, a unit that had come a long way on the offensive, was again thrown into the field in order to hold up the Germans, to harass them and thereby make it possible to strike another telling blow at the German army.

Goreshnak's tank and four others ambushed in the woods that lay on either side of the road running to the northwest. Beyond the woods lay an open field, bare of snow and crackling with the frost.

The German tanks and mobile infantry were expected to appear from behind the hills in a counter-attack on our forces on this sector of the front.

Ivan Goreshnak sat in his camouflaged tank, peering intently through the narrow slit in the armour. The wind was bowing the dry grass and driving tumbleweeds across the field over which the clouds hung low. Ivan looked over his crew. All were in their places, the ex-

postman Sukharev from Moscow, Akopov from Yerevan, Babushkin from some village in the Urals, all of them coming from different places to sit here under one armoured roof.

Orders were received to get ready for action. Constantly growing black dots could be seen now through the slit. Panzers. There were thirty of them.

Our artillery opened up on the flanks from the woods. Smoke rose over the tanks. One of them blazed up and halted. Then another caught fire, but continued to advance. New, longish dots appeared on the horizon.

"That's truck-borne infantry," said Sukharev, pulling on his fur mittens. He was the tank driver.

Shells landed amidst the German tanks scattered over the field. They manoeuvred around the bursting shells and tried to dodge them, but three more blazed up. The rest continued to advance. Thereupon the Soviet tanks were ordered to come out of ambush and intercept the German panzers.

"Let's go, fellows!" said Goreshnak.

Sukharev opened the throttle. . . .

Goreshnak could not say how much time passed from the beginning of the tank battle to the moment when his smoking vehicle rushed forward at a third enemy panzer after wrecking two others. This was the enemy tank that had set him ablaze. Perhaps it was only two or three minutes, perhaps the whole day, until sunset, until the moment when darkness blinded Ivan, killed the gunner, Sasha Babushkin, and blacked out the tank. . . .

His head felt as if it were weighted with lead, his heart ached and he could not breathe it was so stifling. Just before losing consciousness, Ivan tore his overalls from his chest with one hand and with the other pressed his heart. . . . For the barest instant he was conscious of a hard cover in the pocket of his tunic and realized that it was his Party membership card. Straightening

For the Mountains of the Caucasus, the Treasures and Sunshine of Central Asia!

ALEXANDER MATROSSOV
Hero of the Soviet Union

up immediately he shouted to Sukharev through the rumbling and roaring and smoke:

"Let's ram him!"

Goreshnak ran his machine straight into the German tank, which never ceased fire. The crash shook the ground. Lightning flashed before Ivan's eye, then all was dark. . . .

* * *

"He'll pull through!" Goreshnak heard someone say, and opened his eyes.

The nurse standing beside his bed said:

"Lie quietly now, Goreshnak, you're terribly restless. . . . The splinter almost pierced your heart. . . . They pulled you out of the flames. . . ."

UKRAINIAN FRONT
Izvestia
February 20, 1944

ALONE ON TWO STREETS!

The unit that had routed the Germans from the railway station and town had been relieved, and the men were returning to their own lines to get a hot meal and some sleep. They were marching through the streets they had stormed during the night, recollecting their operation as if it were a long vanished dream.

Suddenly a woman rushed through the gate of a big house and cried out:

"Someone's moaning on the roof!"

Six or seven men dashed after her, while the others settled down to wait for their return.

Once again the men began to talk about the night skirmish, each one convinced that he was best able to give an accurate picture of what had taken place.

One thing was clear, and that is that the Germans had got it heavy from our tommy gunners around this neighbourhood. True, a youngster who lived on the next street claimed to have seen with his own eyes how the Germans were running about in a panic through his block as they were being wiped out by heavy fire from the air, from an aeroplane, he insisted. But his assertion was unanimously rejected, for no aeroplane, of course, could possibly have taken part in a ground battle at night. The lad, however, insisted that he was right and pointed to the dead bodies of Germans lying at either end of the block, and to the shattered store windows.

Just then the men who had gone up to the roof came back with someone in their arms.

The man they were carrying was a wounded tommy gunner, Kostya Vaksashvili. Although they lowered him to the sidewalk against the wall with the utmost care, he groaned at the slightest movement. But as soon as they laid him down the first thing he did was to ask for his tommy gun and insist that they put it down beside him.

Once again the men began to argue about the fighting in this block and called on the wounded tommy gunner to act as judge in their dispute. After all he had been in a position to see everything since he had been there the whole night. About twenty men surrounded Vaksashvili, their eyes fixed intently on his pale face.

"They sure got it heavy from the crossroads," said someone in a tone that admitted no denial.

"What do you mean from the crossroads!" said Vaksashvili with a frown. "Surikov ran off with his unit to hell knows where while I remained alone on two streets. . . . I climbed up to the roof of the corner house; I could see it was a wonderful place to fire from. Just then the Germans showed up. . . . I let them have three bursts and they jumped back around the corner. I sprinted over the roof after them and let'em have three

more. . . . They'd come this way and I'd follow them over the roof, then they'd rush that way and me after them over the roof again. . . . It was a regular cross country race. . . ."

After a slight pause the wounded man continued:

"I must have done for five men and routed about twenty when I was plugged in the arm. As soon as I began bandaging my arm I spotted about fifty Germans come running down the street again. I drove them off too, but I got it in the arm a second time. . . . I began to feel terribly dizzy and wanted to come down from the roof and get into the house, but some more Germans came up. . . . There I was, alone on two streets, and having to take care of them even if I bust. . . . After I was hit in the leg it was awfully tough going. In the end they drilled my shoulder, but after that, thank God, no more Germans showed up. . . . I just stretched out, you see, passed out cold. When I came to, it was light and our fellows were coming down the street making a helluva hullabaloo. . . . I didn't have the strength to shout and so I began to groan. Good thing this lady heard me. . . ."

NORTH CAUCASUS
Krasnaya Zvezda
February 11, 1943

ELEVEN MEN

Today the whole front is talking about the heroic deed of eleven brave men: Mikhail Kabribov, Babayar Gaparov, Abdurakhman Irdanov, Diar Akhmedov, Sapkhar Poiziev, Narmurad Khaitov, Saipir Mordanov, Khudaikul Musaev, Bakhmarim Alibekov, Sabir Tlepov, Tamel Khuzin. The hill for which they fought has been

named "The Hill of the Eleven Heroes of the East." Here is the story of this fierce battle.

A group of men under the command of Second Lieutenant Mikhail Kabribov—nine Uzbeks, one Kazakh and one Tatar—was holding a hill which commanded a view over the surrounding terrain. The Germans had made a number of attempts to capture this hill but the men who were holding it kept them off. All the attempts of the enemy to capture the hill with small forces were repulsed. Thereupon the Germans attacked with a force of about three hundred men, who were given orders to take the hill at all costs.

Kabribov coolly took the enemy's measure when he caught sight of the attackers.

"It'll have to be thirty Fritzes for every bayonet of ours. If there's anyone who's afraid, I want him to leave the ranks immediately," he said.

No one stirred.

"Then let us swear to die rather than retreat," said Kabribov loudly, "so that our names will be uttered with pride in our native East and not with curses."

He ordered the men to take up a circular defence.

The Germans advanced on the hill at full height. The first volley sounded. The enemy fell to the ground as if they were mown down. Some of them remained lying forever, others crawled on. The first Nazi platoon reached the hill on their bellies. Then they jumped to their feet and rushed forward.

"Let 'em have it, Gaparov!" shouted Kabribov.

Machine gunner Gaparov's well-aimed burst cut down the German platoon, but others were coming on. The air was filled with the deafening chatter of tommy-gun and rifle fire. Fierce fighting ensued. The Germans sustained heavy losses, but could not gain the top of the hill.

"Figure that we've done for half of the Nazis. That means we can wipe out the rest of them!" shouted

Kabribov, carried away by the excitement of the battle.

"Comrade Commander, I'm all out of cartridges!" reported one of the men suddenly.

At about the same time the cartridges of some of the other men also gave out.

"Fix bayonets! Follow me!" shouted the Commander and jumped out of the trench to encounter the Germans. All ten men followed him. Even Gaparov, who had been wounded, went into the bayonet attack. Blood was streaming down his face as he shouted "Hurrah!" in a fearful and menacing voice.

In the hard-fought bayonet encounter that followed all was turmoil. . . .

Several hours later a unit of Red Armymen who had come up to the rescue pushed back the Nazis. Here the men saw a mountain of German corpses, the result of the hand-to-hand encounter. By holding the Nazis at the approaches to the hill and destroying a large number of their officers and men, the eleven sons of the East had made it possible for our unit to deploy and throw back the enemy.

While searching for the bodies of the heroes who had died the death of the brave, our men heard a faint groan. It was the machine gunner Babayar Gaparov, whose life blood was fast ebbing away. He told his comrades about this battle.

"We did not let them pass," he whispered. These were his last words. He died in his comrades' arms.

No! They did not let the enemy pass! A Tatar, a Kazakh and nine Uzbeks—on Russian soil they defended the high mountains of the Caucasus, the treasures and sunlight of Central Asia.

NORTHWEST OF STALINGRAD
Komsomolskaya Pravda
November 5, 1942

On February 23, 1943, the battalion set out through the woods, avoiding the roads. They were on their way to carry out orders to capture the village of Chernushky.

Sasha Matrossov, a burly, lively young man, marched in front followed by his friends, Bardabaev, Kopylov and Vorobyov. They had trained and drilled together, and together they had come to the front. Now they were doing their duty with all the vigour and ardour of youth. The enemy had forced them to give up everything they had learned to like, everything that had become near and dear to them. Setting their jaws wrathfully, they had taken up arms and gone to the front with the one thought of taking revenge on the enemy for all the atrocities he had perpetrated in their native land.

At dawn the group of tommy gunners headed by First Lieutenant Artyukhov reached the outskirts of the pine forest. They had only to cross a field studded with bushes, then a small woods, and beyond that lay Chernushky. But here Artyukhov's group encountered the Germans. Three machine guns opened fire from a hill and fighting began.

Red Armymen Gubin and Donsky blocked the German pillboxes on either flank fairly quickly, but the third pillbox, the one in the middle, was still firing away furiously, covering the approaches to Chernushky. The men could not show themselves on the field. Everyone realized that it would be a hard job to capture this woodland fortress. Taking to the right, Artyukhov and Matrossov dashed ahead about forty metres towards the German pillbox. From here they had a clear view of the steady stream of fire pouring from the embrasure. Artyukhov called for six tommy gunners.

Sasha Matrossov brought up the tommy gunners and Artyukhov chose three of them.

"You are to crawl up to the pillbox and open tommy-gun fire at the embrasure," he ordered.

The tommy gunners crawled off, but as soon as they appeared on the field they were spotted from the pillbox. A slanting stream of fire shot out at them from the embrasure. One Red Armyman was killed immediately, the other two wounded. First Lieutenant Artyukhov called up the other tommy gunners.

"Keep more to the right," he ordered.

But they too were killed.

Then Sasha Matrossov said in a low but firm voice: "I'll go!"

He made a few abrupt spurts, then fell on his side and quickly crawled ahead, clutching his tommy gun and keeping to the right of his fallen comrades. He was not noticed from the pillbox. Only his own men could see him. With bated breath they followed his every move. He crawled so close to the pillbox that he was enveloped in the smoke coming from the embrasure. Suddenly he raised his tommy gun and sent out a burst. A blast roared in the pillbox. As was ascertained afterwards, his bullet had hit a shell. The German machine gun had been silenced.

Everyone who had watched this scene breathed a noisy and happy sigh of relief. The men made ready to dash forward. But a few seconds later the machine gun came to life again. Then the men saw Sasha Matrossov jump to his feet and with his left side, with his heart, block the embrasure of the pillbox, from which fire and smoke had been pouring. The vicious rattling of bullets immediately ceased on the outskirts of the pine forest. The Red Armymen dashed forward. The woodland fortress was captured and Chernushky was freed from the German yoke.

By decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., Guardsman Alexander Matveyevich Matrossov was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

By order of the People's Commissar of Defence dated September 8, 1943, the 254th Guards Rifle Regiment of the 56th Guards Rifle Division was named the Alexander Matrossov 254th Guards Rifle Regiment.

CHERNUSHKY
Pravda
September 12, 1943

WE WON OUT

Guards Major Alexei Matrossov, Hero of the Soviet Union, Flight Officer, took part in the defence of Moscow in 1941. In the following episode, we have used the notes made by Matrossov himself as soon as he returned from an operational flight. The remarks in parentheses are ours.

December 15, 1941. Thirty-eighth flight. 3 p.m. G. railway station. Altitude—400-200 metres. . . .

(The situation was as follows at that time: The Germans were being driven back from Moscow. The roads were crowded with their retreating echelons. There was a terrific jam at the G. railway station. Matrossov swept over it boldly and unloaded some bombs. Just then. . . .)

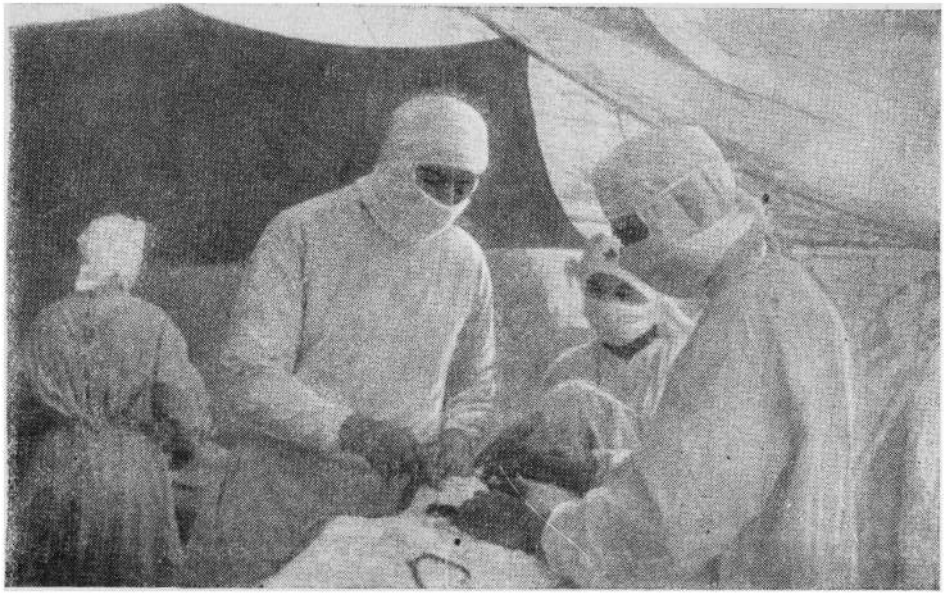
. . . during my first run-up over the target the ack-acks holed starboard fuel tank 4. . . .

(In other words, the main fuel tank was damaged. Matrossov's plane was enveloped in flames. He was still carrying some bombs and did not want to leave until he had unloaded all of them. He made a second sweep in his burning aircraft.)

. . . During the second run-up both motors gave out. . . .

(The motors went dead because there was no fuel. The aircraft was gliding, constantly losing altitude and on fire. In his usual tone of voice, Matrossov gave the order: "Unload bombs!")

ALEXEI MATROSSOV
Hero of the Soviet Union



An Operation in a Field Dressing Station

. . . gliding along we unloaded the bombs we were carrying inside the plane. Port tank 3 was hit. The situation was critical. I headed the plane straight for the column. . . .

(Matrossov had decided to do as the immortal Captain Gastello had done—crash-land his blazing plane in the midst of the German column. Veering over the column he ordered the gunners to open fire. The crew opened machine-gun fire on the column below. Major Matrossov, slight and gentle-voiced, had a good grip on himself, and in this manoeuvre of his there was one chance in a hundred that he would manage to pull through. Meanwhile the crew kept firing away. Here is how Matrossov describes that moment.)

. . . The gunner and navigator did a wonderful job of gunning. . . .

(The Germans had scattered and taken cover in the ditches. They had completely ceased fire at the plane. All the time Matrossov was working away frantically to get the motor going with the emergency tank. With one hand he was steering the plane and with the other firing a machine gun blindly.)

. . .The port motor started up on the emergency tank. . . .

(In answer to the question: "What was your altitude?" Matrossov shrugged his shoulders: "Only just clear of the ground. Ten metres, maybe.")

. . . Then the starboard motor started. Picked up speed and vanished in the clouds. . . .

(A miracle had occurred. But only a man with almost incredible coolness, a tremendous will to victory and exceptional ability to keep his presence of mind in any situation could have achieved this miracle.)

. . . The bombs went home beautifully. The firing wasn't bad either. Three thousand cartridges. The aircraft was pretty badly bunged up. . . .

(The aircraft was indeed badly bunged up. The navigator's gun was so overheated it had fused. Matrossov

brought the plane back to base. When the crew scrambled out of the plane they embraced silently as if they had not seen one another for years. The following is the last line of Matrossov's notes on this raid:)

. . .We won out. . . .

(There is nothing that can be added to this.)

Moskovsky Bolshevik
February 22, 1944

DOCTOR ISSAYEV, PARATROOPER

Surgeon Abusaid Issayev, chief of the medical service in a paratroop detachment, never left his unit even when it was storming Luchi. Lieutenant Petrov, a great friend of the doctor's, was up front with an advance group. Before the hostilities had begun, he had said to Issayev as he ran past:

"If anything happens, I want you to know that I won't let anyone cut me up but you."

"Don't worry," Issayev had shouted after him, "my hand will be steady."

When the two end houses, which stood on a rising, had been captured from the Nazis and the men were pushing further, Issayev decided to set up a first-aid station in one of them immediately.

Taking three orderlies he went into the big smoke-stained room.

The orderlies quickly took down the bunks that the Germans had built and began to fix up an operating table. Just then the windowframe flew out with a crash. A mortar bomb had burst near the house. Issayev was wounded in the side by a splinter. With the help of the orderlies he began to dress the wound, but fainted before finishing.

... Issayev was lying on the floor unconscious. The

orderlies quickly finished dressing his wound and carried him into the next room, carefully lowering him to the table. One of them hastily put the room to rights, boarding up the smashed window. Meanwhile the others were already receiving the wounded. They made simple dressings, but more than that consoled and cheered up the men.

"Whatever will we do without the doctor?" exclaimed Vasya, a young medical orderly.

"Never mind, brother, this isn't Moscow or the 'big front.' You can't call up a hospital from here. Whoever we jump with will have to do the doctoring," replied a veteran parachutist.

Vasya stayed behind to look after the doctor. The latter had already recovered consciousness. Before that he had merely stirred his lips painfully, raving about his wife who, had lived in Leningrad and who had not wanted to leave, and about the son he was expecting.

Soon two gravely wounded men were brought in. One of them had been badly hit in both legs, the other in the left arm. They were groaning loudly and calling for the doctor. The groans of the wounded men could be heard even through the thick walls. Doctor Issayev opened his eyes and listened. He asked for a drink. Taking a few greedy gulps, he tried to stand up. The orderly supported him.

Then he walked in to the wounded men and asked for his instruments. The room became hushed.

The doctor made ready for the first operation. Exerting his will power to the utmost, he forced himself to forget his own agonizing pain. He felt nothing, saw nothing but the bared part of the body of the wounded man lying before him. The operation was successful.

Then came another operation, and still another....

...The sound of the fighting penetrated to the room where the dressing station had been set up. Doctor Issayev was finishing his sixth operation. A few minutes passed and the door of the house flew open with a bang. Two

orderlies carried in Lieutenant Petrov. He had just been wounded in the stomach. At the sight of his friend lying on the stretcher, Issayev swayed. He knew that Petrov's life was in his hands, but his strength was already giving way.

His eyes were bloodshot with the strain and a large lock of his blue-black hair fell over his cold, perspiring forehead. Gritting his teeth and making a superhuman effort, Issayev summoned all his professional skill to his aid and began to operate on his friend, uttering only the one sentence:

"My hand will not falter, I promised you that, old man."

He had just finished making the last stitches when a violent convulsion shook his over-strained body. The instruments clattered to the floor from his hands, he staggered and fell.

Sacrificing himself, he had saved seven lives that day. . . .

Krasnaya Zvezda
May 13, 1942

A FLAMING TANK AGAINST A "TIGER"

The tank unit in which Sergeant Major Alexander Nikolaev served was given the mission of occupying a certain village, the approaches to which were heavily mined and covered by enemy guns and trench mortars.

Hostilities began early in the morning. The Germans encountered the unit with a hurricane of fire. The clank and roar of hundreds of tanks rumbled over the battlefield while thousands of shells pitted the ground. In order to hold back the onslaught, the Germans sent over twenty "Tigers" into the field.

Nikolaev was driving the commander's tank.

From the turret the Major gave his orders over the

Forward!

OLEG KOSHEVOY
Hero of the Soviet Union

intercom, directing the course of the tanks. The avalanche of Soviet machines swept ahead at full speed.

"Cannon on the left! Let 'er have it!" Nikolaev heard the Major's voice.

Turning abruptly to the left, Nikolaev saw a group of Germans training a heavy gun. Which of them would get the other? Whom would time favour? Screwing up his eyes to a narrow slit, Nikolaev drove full tilt at the gun. Not a single Fritz got away. Leaving behind a heap of mangled metal, the tank continued on its way.

"'Tigers' ahead! Keep your eyes peeled!" warned the Major.

Some distance away, against a background of woods, Nikolaev could see several clumsy, squat vehicles. The "Tigers" opened long-range fire at our tanks.

The Major gave orders to attack the "Tiger" on the right flank. It was the closest of all. Nikolaev headed for the target. Only four hundred metres separated them. The "Tiger's" shells were coming closer.

The Major opened fire. His shells landed dangerously near the "Tiger," and while trying to get out of range, it exposed its side. The Major let two shells fly into it, one after the other, and all was up with the enemy.

"The Major is wounded!" Alexander heard the voice of the man in the turret.

Suddenly a terrific blast shook the tank. Soot-black smoke and flame blinded the tankmen. Their machine was on fire.

Nikolaev realized that they had to get out of firing range as soon as possible. The tankmen left their blazing vehicle and carried off the wounded Major.

With an ache in his heart Alexander turned to take a last look at his burning machine. The tank was in flames. Even so it was a formidable sight. Its gun stared in the direction of the enemy and it looked for all the world as if it would speed ahead at any moment and set fire to them.

Nikolaev heard the rumble of an approaching tank. Under cover of the rye, a "Tiger" was overtaking it. The danger was great.

"Save the Major, I'll stop the Fritz. Goodbye!" shouted Alexander to his friends and rushed back to his flaming machine.

His comrades watched him from a trench.

Scrambling into the blazing vehicle he switched on the motor. The heart of the tank was still alive. With a deafening roar of victory, the motor started up. Nikolaev steered his flaming machine straight at the enemy. He had calculated correctly.

Enveloped in deadly flames, the tank crashed into the "Tiger." With a deafening clang and roar the side of the heavy armoured vehicle fell off. The shells of both tanks were blown up by the fire and the terrific impact. A pillar of flames and earth raised the heavy fragments of armour high into the air. . . .

A heap of metal, twisted by the flames and the explosion, was all that remained on the spot of the duel. . . .

SECOND UKRAINIAN FRONT
Komsomolskaya Pravda
March 5, 1943

FATHER AND SON

Guards Major Gamaley was known as the old Young Communist Leaguer in his artillery unit. But there was a time, and not so long ago, when he had called his father the old Y.C.L.'er. And he was not the only one to do so. That was what the whole factory settlement called his father, a jolly smelter with a stentorian voice and a face that looked as if it had been seared through long communion with the flames of a blast furnace.

The father used to take his son to see the blast furnace when he was still a child and had accustomed him, as he used to say, to fire. Later they had gone below and the father had given his son a blue glass in a copper frame through which the youngster, rising on tiptoe, overawed and beaming with joy, had peered at the raging flames and streams of incandescent metal squirming so ominously.

The war had parted father and son. Gamaley junior loved his Old Man, as he called his father, but in the first year of the war he had lost all trace of him. The son had been serving on the western border then. The Donbas had been occupied and he did not know what had become of his father or where he was at the time. . . .

For two years of the war Gamaley junior had travelled the thorny path of retreat. In the winter of 'forty-two he had gone over to the offensive. In the spring of 'forty-three he had been wounded and had spent three months in hospital. In August he caught up with his regiment at the Mius River and together with it had pierced the German line of defence—the Mius Front. Nameless Hill, which he and a group of men had held for three days and three nights, was called Gamaley Hill by his division.

He yearned for the Donbas. He never told anyone in the division what it was that drew him there, but in his heart of hearts he still nourished the hope that his father might be alive. And when he reached Rovenki, which was only a stone's throw from his native settlement, he was gripped by an excitement that is best understood by those who during that summer had retaken their own homes, their own bits of soil, their own towns, from the Germans.

At the beginning of September his detachment was given the task of penetrating into the German rear and cutting off the enemy's line of retreat. One night the commander of the guerillas operating in these districts visited the detachment and suggested that they trap

the Germans, luring them into an engagement in a narrow neck of a valley while their main forces attacked the enemy on the flanks.

The guerilla fighters undertook the task of enticing the Germans into the valley, luring them into the marshes and quicksands after them. The Commissar of the detachment, who was called "Father" by the guerilla fighters, was to head this guerilla group. By drawing the enemy after them, they were going to certain death, but it was just this fearlessness and resoluteness on their part that would decide the entire success of the operation.

"Father" was supposed to send up three blue rockets at an agreed time as a signal that their manoeuvre was developing according to plan. The agreed time had long passed but there had been no signal. Gamaley cursed himself for trusting too much to others and for having left the hardest part of the task to the little handful of guerillas whom the Germans had most likely wiped out.

But the three rockets finally did appear in the sky, and he forgot all his misgivings. It was now his turn to act. He attacked from the flanks, cutting through the narrow German column. The more vigorously he attacked, the further the Germans were drawn into the valley and the less chances they had of getting out.

The next morning, when he reported at Divisional Headquarters on the results of the night encounter, Major Gamaley frankly stated that he owed his success to the guerilla fighters, who had taken the first and main blow on themselves. This detachment of brave men, he said, was headed by a Commissar whom they called "Father."

"He's wounded," said the Commander of the guerilla detachment, who had just come in. In his hand he held a leather tobacco pouch.

"What's this?" inquired Gamaley mechanically,

taking the pouch from him. In the pouch lay a blue glass in a copper frame—he would have known it in a thousand.

"Was he a smelter?" asked Gamaley slowly.

"Yes," replied the guerilla fighter. "He asked me to give this to his son if he died, said his grandson might be a smelter, too."

. . . The Commissar's big body was sprawled on a narrow cot. He was breathing heavily and delirious.

"How is he?" asked the Major, speaking with difficulty.

"He's in grave danger," whispered the doctor.

The Major sat in silence at the side of the cot holding his father's feverish hand for a long time.

"He'll pull through!" exclaimed the Major suddenly. "He's stubborn, he is."

"Do you know him?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," said Gamaley junior, "I know him well. We're both old Y.C.L.'ers."

DONBAS.
Krasnaya Zvezda
October 29, 1943

A BLAZING MAN ROSE FROM THE GROUND

After the artillery preparation, Captain Velichko's tanks passed through our infantry's lines and stormed the German positions. The infantry went over the top in the wake of the tanks under a fierce barrage of German cannon and mortar fire, under a regular cloudburst of bullets and air bombs.

Just then a shell hit one of the caterpillars of Captain Velichko's tank. The machine skidded round, turning its side to the Germans, and a second shell burst in the fuel tank. One after the other the tankmen scrambled out of the vehicle, their clothing in flames. Knowing that

the shells in the tank would begin to burst at any moment, Velichko fell flat and the same instant heard a roar and rattle overhead. Getting up he saw that the infantrymen who had been following the tanks were hugging the ground, as not only his tank, but a number of others had been crippled by German shells. Victory was slipping past although no more than three hundred metres remained to the little village which was their goal. A final spurt was needed to decide the outcome of the battle.

Suddenly the infantrymen who were lying behind the tanks saw a blazing man rise from the ground, turn his face towards them and wave his tommy gun in the air, shouting something. They did not immediately understand what this man in flames was shouting, but they saw distinctly how he turned to face the Germans and then dashed forward. It was Captain Velichko.

At that moment a lull happened to set in, but this moment was fated to become the deciding moment of the day. The hundreds of eyes fixed on the blazing tankman seemed to kindle at the sight. In a bound the men jumped to their feet, while the tankmen crawled out of their wrecked machines. Caught up in a wave of enthusiasm and fury, they ran forward under the iron hail as if a flaming spirit had arisen in their midst and was leading them over the field that had been churned up by the iron ploughshares of war. . . .

BELGOROD DIRECTION
Pravda
February 23, 1943

MARIA KUTUZOVA

In 1942 German tanks broke into Novocherkassk. There were still about one hundred seriously wounded patients in the railway hospital who were in need of im-

mediate surgical attention. There had been no time to evacuate them, and the hospital superintendent, Surgeon Kutuzov, and his wife, Doctor Maria Kutuzova, decided to remain behind together with the men who had shed their blood for their country.

. . . The first shell splinters landed on the operation table.

"Hurry down to the basement!" Maria called to her husband. "I've fixed up a first-aid station there."

The wounded men were brought down to the basement and placed on cots, stretchers and mattresses.

The nurses ran home and brought back some old railway uniforms of their husbands' and their neighbours', who were railway workers, and these clothes were hung up on the clothes racks in place of the military uniforms of the patients. Surgeon Kutuzov promised to take care of the Party membership cards and decorations himself.

"Dont't forget that you're not Red Armymen now but civilians who've been wounded during a bombardment," Doctor Kutuzova cautioned the patients.

The Germans came to the hospital the next day.

"This isn't a military hospital," Dr. Kutuzova explained to the officer calmly. "This is a hospital for civilians, railway workers who've been wounded at work during bombardments."

The officer made the round of the wards, questioned the patients slyly, peered everywhere, but found nothing. Thereupon he shouted angrily:

"Give me the registry book!"

Doctor Kutuzova gave the officer the book without the slightest hesitation. She had foreseen this too. The old registry, which had listed all the military ranks of the patients, had been hidden in a safe place. In the new one the Communist and military advocate Redkina had been given the name of Reznikova and was registered as a housewife who had been travelling to her husband

in Krasnodar. Lieutenant Malyshev had been converted into a student in the agricultural college. The other patients were similarly registered.

The German left. This was the first victory in the fight for the lives of the wounded Red Army-men.

The Kutuzovs and their assistants were in constant danger of their lives, but nothing daunted them. The Nazis made frequent searches. They were hunting for military men, but they never found any.

The problem was how to feed the patients. Despite the skill of the cook, Popov, the small food supply dwindled rapidly. The horse they slaughtered after this did not last long either.

"What do you say to appealing to the village people?" Doctor Kutuzova asked her fellow workers.

After speaking to her mother and to her neighbours, orderly Miltina brought back some milk, eggs and apples. The Kutuzovs' son found out that a load of grain had been left in the next yard by a certain unit. This grain was also brought to the hospital little by little. Then nurses Slyusareva, Budakova and Pechorskaya visited the nearby collective farms and soon products began to come from there to the hospital regularly. Women frequently came with pails and pots of soup and porridge. Shura Kamoishko, the station charwoman, "adopted" one of the patients and attended to him as if he were a member of her family. Subsequently her example was followed by many others. Collective farm women who brought their wounded children for treatment also took individual patients and even entire wards under their wing. The Germans could not squeeze the life out of the hospital with the bony hand of hunger.

On the day Novocherkassk was freed, Maria Kutuzova said goodbye to the last group of patients, who had become as near and dear to her as her own kin during the seven months of Nazi occupation. All these men who had been

saved by the fearlessness of Maria Kutuzova and her husband entered the ranks of the advancing units of the Red Army.

NOVOCHERKASSK
Gudok (The Whistle)
March 8, 1944

WE SHALL NEVER FORGET

Oleg Koshevoy lay on the floor in the darkness and stared at the thin streak of light under the door behind which tramped the bored sentry, whistling, humming and tapping out his pipe.

His broken arm had swelled; it was a good thing that he had taken off his jacket immediately after the interrogation. It was a big jacket, his father's, and drawing up his legs he covered himself with it.

Today he had lots to think over, but the most important was already behind him. He had held out and had not betrayed his comrades. Now he could think of anything he chose, for there would be no more interrogations. Night would come, then morning—then death.

When the Germans had entered Krasnodon, it seemed impossible that Young Communist League members who were for the most part mere schoolboys of sixteen and seventeen would dare to do what they had done despite the crushing force of the enemy.

How easy, how simple life had been! In the seventh grade he had entered the Young Communist League. But only now had he found out how hard it was to be a League member.

He had found out the meaning of the solemn oath he had taken during the secret meeting in the cellar of the ruined house: ". . . If ever under torture or through my own cowardice I break this sacred oath, may my name

and the names of those dear to me be forever accursed and may my own comrades put an end to my life."

Being a League member meant, he had learned, lying in ambush at the riverside for hours amidst the weeds and then with a sudden lunge striking out swiftly to send the body of a German officer flying into the water. It meant scattering leaflets during a moving picture performance, hanging out flags on the hospital building on the eve of November 7, installing a homemade radio in a pit dug under the kitchen floor, fitting up a secret arsenal in the wrecked city bathhouse. It meant keeping silent when his mother asked him why he came home so late at night.

Yet suddenly a tormenting and harrowing wave of longing swept over him. He would die! He would hang on the square like a scarecrow with his head twisted to one side.

"Mother," he whispered, "where are you? It's hard, help me."

It seemed to him that she entered the room, erect, pale, wearing the dress he knew so well.

"What have they done to you!"

"How did I behave? Was I all right? It was hard. Did you think of me? Are you angry with me? You know I couldn't have done anything else. As for dying, I'm not afraid of it," he said staunchly, and his heart began to beat with joy, with pride at the fact that this was the truth. For it was true that there are all kinds of deaths. There are base deaths, cowardly deaths. But his death would be honest, as honest as his life.

* * *

Excerpt from the *Komsomolskaya Pravda*: "Last night the last order of the Staff was transmitted to all the cells by the Morse code: 'Tomorrow we will be led to our execution. We will be led through the city. Everyone is to sing Lenin's favourite song. We shall die,

but with the shadow of our gallows, the Germans will not be able to put out the sun, which will again rise over liberated Russian soil. . . .'"

Excerpt from the *Komsomolskaya Pravda*: "Those who saw this lad going to his death with a bared grey head will remember him forever. His face was inspired, his eyes were shining. . . ."

From the diary of a German officer: "January 3, 1943. Thirteen Russian youngsters executed. Today I realized that Germany will lose the war."

KRASNODON
Izvestia
October 15, 1943